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Chief Instructor, SW Course TSD/TR

24 March 1960

THRU : Chief/TSD/TR

Educational Specialist/OTR

Report on Secret Writing Course Monitoring

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I. INTRODUCTION

The writer of this memorandum monitored the Secret Writing Course from 14 March to 18 March 1960 as a result of a request from the Chief, TSD/Training dated 9 July 1959. The purpose of this monitoring was to point out the strengths and weaknesses of this course and to make suggestions and recommendations pertinent to the improvement of such training.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

"To train the individual in Clandestine Services Secret Writing techniques. The student practices the basic methods of writing, restoration and development of representative types of secret writing systems until his records can satisfy routine operational requirements. Attention is given to familiarizing the student with training methods which he might employ should he be required to train others in the absence of an SW Technical Officer." (Perhaps a phrase similar to "develop a minimum level of operational proficiency" should replace the word "train" in the first sentence; thus implying a degree of training.)

III. GENERAL INFORMATION

There were a total of six students in this class, ranging in GS levels from 8 through 14. The students came from the following components: DD/P-5 and DD/S-1 (the writer of this memorandum). One student was being trained as a future instructor in the Secret Writing Course; another student was a TSD Technical Officer. Most of the students had been with the Agency quite a few years and the range varied from one year, eight months to ten years. The class met full time for one week, 40 hours, and included two "night" problems. Two of the students were scheduled for overseas assignments within several months. The Chief Instructor was a recent graduate of the Instructional Techniques Course.

The writer of this memorandum had a feeling that some of the students in the class were being "forced" to take the class. Their attitude was one of passiveness to what is basically an interesting and intriguing subject. The Chief Instructor apparently felt this attitude and went out of his way to make the instruction interesting and stimulating. Subsequent talks with the Chief Instructor confirmed that this class was apparently atypical.

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IV. STRENGTHS

Generally speaking, this course is reasonably well organized and administered. A number of good instructional points were noted and mention should be made of them, including:

1. Capability of the Chief Instructor to present good training demonstrations of the many and detailed techniques involved in SW.
2. The two "night" operational problems were very effective in simulating situations in which the Case Officer or his agent might find himself in the preparation or development of a SW message.
3. Rapid feedback to the student relative to his SW techniques.
4. Ample opportunity for repetitive practice to develop minimum skills.
5. The close supervision and critiquing by the Chief Instructor of student work.
6. Flexibility of the course content allowing coverage specific to student needs.
7. Development of situations in which the student acted, not only as a Case Officer but also as an agent, in order that the student would gain a realistic concept of the problems and emotions experienced in SW communications.
8. Effective use of several guest lecturers. These lectures were not only highly qualified technicians but also competent in instructional techniques.
9. Adequacy and arrangement of training materials in a clean and neat order.

V. SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made with the intent that they will contribute to some degree in the improvement of instruction and student learning. They should not be read nor interpreted as any official demand upon the Chief Instructor to implement them. In fact, due to the present method of conducting this course, several of these suggestions are somewhat minor in nature. Further, they have been discussed with the Chief Instructor prior to being placed in this memorandum.

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1. As presently constituted, the course could adequately be completed in four full-time days. The pace of the course is leisurely and more than ample time is allowed for work and practice. Since this is basically a skill training course, it is suggested that the course length be retained at five full days and additional subject matter content be given to fill up this time. This additional material would more logically be training in additional techniques and types of SW rather than additional practice periods since no extensive degree of proficiency is desired other than that degree presently accomplished. Consideration should also be given to the development of a student kit or manual which would include, among other items, written materials which students could read during any spare time since the problem of individual differences with respect to speed of accomplishment of assignments is paramount in this type of training.

2. The presently existing lesson plans are inadequate. They are too detailed in substantive material and are written in narrative form. The lesson plan objectives should be stated as to "student outcomes" rather than instructor accomplishments. The plans might also include questions to be asked which would cover the main points of each lesson and serve as an excellent means of summary. The lesson plans should be revised into an "outline" type format indicating the main and sub-sections of material and content to be covered similar to the format suggested in the Instructional Techniques Course. The purpose of lesson plans is to serve as an outline, guide, or stimulus to the instructor rather than a complete textbook of details and techniques.

3. On the "TSS EVALUATION/SECRET WRITING COURSE" form (attachment A) consideration should be given to the possible revision of the four levels of grading, particularly with respect to 2. E. "Proficiency in Techniques". The real purpose of this course is not to produce qualified technicians in SW to any high level of proficiency but to give the student a minimum level of operational proficiency in basic concepts, techniques, and systems. These rating levels might give the student's supervisor an erroneous concept of the student's level of training or ability in SW, particularly if the level of "EXCELLENT" is used. Perhaps an "unsatisfactory-satisfactory" rating would be sufficient, or at best, an "unsatisfactory-satisfactory-good" division. Further, the various elements upon which the student will be evaluated should be explained by the Chief Instructor at the beginning of the course. It would even be desirable if the Chief Instructor prepared various samples of writing, developments, etc. to be explained and shown to the students and used as criteria or standards of attainment in evaluation of student work.

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4. There is no "final test" or similar activity, as such, in this course. Completion of attachment A represents the Chief Instructor's analysis of student accomplishment in the several practical exercises in this course. Thought should be given to a final practical-type problem or activity which would bring together the many techniques and considerations presented. Such a practical problem could be constructed so that it would "tie together" many of the learnings and skills accomplished earlier in the course. In fact, such a comprehensive problem, organized on a team basis, could logically involve the students in simple aspects of the problems in SW planning, little of which, was accomplished practically in the course. The final evaluation would then reflect student accomplishments during the course as well as the final problem, all, of course, weighed appropriately.

5. Very few training aids are used in this course. Handouts (one copy of each) exist which are illustrations of actual SW messages. The Chief Instructor should not overlook the fact that, even though the instructor-student ratio is small, appropriate training aids would be more effective in illustrating certain SW techniques of writing and development than are individual handouts which are passed around from student to student. There are many areas in this course which lend themselves nicely to the effective use of training aids, over-and-above the use of actual materials. Suggested aids might include the following:

- a. sequence of illustrations showing step development of a system with, perhaps, an illustration of a mistake in technique or materials and the results, etc.;
- b. methods of striping a suspected document;
- c. censorship techniques and results.

6. The Chief Instructor should develop some method of follow-up on his graduates to determine the adequacy of the course in meeting the operational needs of the students. Of particular concern here would be the appropriateness of SW methods and techniques taught in the class with respect to those used predominately in actual operations. It is recognized that a certain amount of informal feedback results from rotation of instructors into operational assignments, and while it is true in actual operations that the TSD Technical Officer determines the actual SW method(s) used, wider diversification of training may make the Case Officer more appreciative of the problems and implications to be considered in the final selection of SW method(s) for actual operations. This suggestion relates directly to the previous one with respect to additional subject matter content for this course.

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7. The Chief Instructor might consider the development of student handouts which would contain written instructions for operational problems and other student assignments. In several instances in this class, students did not perform exactly as the instructor had verbally outlined apparently due to misunderstanding or a misconception of what was expected.

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Attachment
As stated above

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